

What is claimed is:

1. An automated rule-based procurement system, comprising:

at least one computer processor;

a data store of vendors accessible to said computer processor;

a data store of vendor parameters relating to said vendors and accessible to said computer processor for use in selecting vendors for a project; and

a user interface operatively associated with said processor for enabling the user to specify requirements for said project;

wherein said rule-based system applies rules to select at least one potential vendor for said project based on the vendor parameters and the project requirements specified by said user.

2. A system as defined in claim 1, further comprising:

a communication module adapted to communicate said project requirements to at least one selected vendor for solicitation of a bid on the project.

3. A system as defined in claim 2, wherein said communication module communicates with said at least one selected vendor by e-mailing a link to the vendor, said link directing said vendor to a web page for accessing said project requirements.

4. A system as defined in claim 3 wherein said at least one selected vendor submits a bid to the system via said web page.

5. A system as defined in claim 2, wherein:

bids are received from a plurality of selected vendors in response to said solicitation; and

said rule-based system applies rules to recommend one of said vendors to complete the project based on the received bids.

6. A system as defined in claim 5, wherein the rule-based system also bases its recommendation of a vendor on said vendor parameters.

7. A system as defined in claim 5, wherein said user interface permits a user to accept or override the system vendor recommendation.

8. A system as defined in claim 5, further comprising a vendor notification module, for notifying vendors of the outcome of the bidding process.

9. A system as defined in claim 5, further comprising a scoring module for receiving input from said user interface as to the quality of the project when completed by a vendor.

10. A system as defined in claim 9, wherein data from said scoring module is stored in said data store of vendor parameters for use in subsequent vendor selection.

11. A system as defined in claim 1, wherein said user interface permits a user to accept or override the system vendor selection.

12. A system as defined in claim 1, further comprising a system administrator interface for enabling an authorized administrator to manage at least one of:

- (a) the project specification process,
- (b) the vendor data store,
- (c) the vendor parameters,
- (d) the user interface,

- (e) the rules to be applied, and
- (f) vendor communications.

13. A system as defined in claim 1, further comprising a reporting module responsive to said user interface for generating reports relating to said project.

14. An automated method for procuring goods or services, comprising:

storing a list of vendors and associated vendor parameters in a database accessible to a computer processor;

providing a user interface operatively associated with said processor, for enabling dialog between a user and a procurement application running on the processor, said interface enabling the user to specify procurement requirements; and

applying rules via said procurement application to select at least one potential vendor based on the vendor parameters and procurement requirements.

15. A method in accordance with claim 14, comprising:

identifying said at least one potential vendor to said user.

16. A method in accordance with claim 15, comprising:

allowing said user to accept or override the identified at least one potential vendor.

17. A method in accordance with claim 14, further comprising:

communicating said procurement requirements to at least one selected vendor for solicitation of a bid on the procurement.

18. A method in accordance with claim 17, wherein said communicating step comprises e-mailing a link to the vendor, said link directing said vendor to a web page for accessing said procurement requirements.

19. A method in accordance with claim 18, comprising:

receiving a bid from the at least one selected vendor via said web page.

20. A method in accordance with claim 17, further comprising:

receiving bids from a plurality of selected vendors; and

applying rules via said procurement application to recommend one of said vendors to provide goods or services based on the submitted bids.

21. A method in accordance with claim 20, wherein the recommendation of a vendor is also based on said vendor parameters.

22. A method in accordance with claim 20, wherein said user interface permits a user to accept or override the system vendor recommendation.

23. A method in accordance with claim 20, further comprising notifying vendors of the outcome of the bidding process.

24. A method in accordance with claim 20, further comprising receiving input from said user interface as to the quality of a vendor's performance upon completion of a job.

25. A method in accordance with claim 24, wherein the user input is maintained for use in subsequent vendor selection.

26. A method in accordance with claim 14, further comprising permitting said user to accept or override the vendor selection.

27. A method in accordance with claim 14, further comprising enabling an authorized administrator to manage at least one of:

- (a) the procurement specification process,
- (b) the list of vendors,
- (c) the vendor parameters,
- (d) the user interface,
- (e) the rules to be applied, and
- (f) vendor communications.